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An Interview with Director Stansfield Turner

"Noonbreak"

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WOMAN: Are CIA break-ins and assassination attempts a thing of the past?

Today on Noonbreak, CIA Director Stansfield Turner joins us to explain past abuses and the reforms that are now underway. But first, with the News at Noon, here's Bob.

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MAN: ...Turner, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is our guest today on Noonbreak. A native of Highland Park, Illinois, Admiral Turner earlier this year was named to head all nine U. S. intelligence agencies, including the CIA, FBI and the National Security Agency, and the military intelligence apparatus of all....

Why don't I just read it? That prompter is too far spaced, and I can't do a thing with it.

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Q: Admiral Stansfield Turner, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is our guest today on Noonbreak. The Admiral's a native of Highland Park, and earlier this year he was named to coordinate all nine U. S. intelligence agencies, including the CIA, the FBI, the National Security Agency, and the military intelligence apparatus of all branches of government, and also the intelligence gathering units within the State, Treasury and Energy Departments. Along with that responsibility goes complete budget control over some eighty million dollars of the U. S. intelligence machine. That responsibility and fiscal clout make Admiral Turner one of the most powerful men in the world today.

Would that be a fair statement that you're a pretty powerful guy?

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DIRECTOR STANSFIELD TURNER: I think that's a bit of an exaggeration, but I feel the responsibilities are very important to our country to have good intelligence today, Bob.

Q: So I'd like to ask you about since you became CIA Director last March. You have dismissed, I think the estimates were two hundred in all. I take it it would be fair to say there's some bad feelings among people in the Central Intelligence Agency. Now when Mr. Schlesinger was CIA Director, he swung a heavy axe and chopped a lot of probably dead wood, he figured, out of the agency. And at the same time he increased his security, he increased his body guards and things like that.

Do you fear that because you've done that various operatives in this spook agency might be out to get you?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Not at all. I've taken no extra security procedures. Both Mr. Schlesinger and I felt the agency was over-staffed, and neither one of us want the taxpayer to pay more than they need. And nor do we want our people to be oversupervised and under-challenged. They are wonderful people, but they need to feel they have a real and full job to do.

Q: What kind of feedback did you get when you started swinging the axe?

DIRECTOR TURNER: The people whose heads fell were very unhappy. Today, morale is definitely on the upswing, because one of the reasons for eliminating some of these people and positions was to make more room for younger people coming along, to provide better career opportunities.

Q: Is it possible that some of those that were dismissed from the CIA would go over to other countries, like Russia?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Anything is possible, Lee. But these are people who have spent a long time with us. Most of them, all but a very, very few were able to retire on a pension from the government. And they wouldn't risk that pension, nor would they be that unpatriotic. They're dedicated Americans.

Q: Now we're coming close to Halloween again, and there was this so-called Halloween massacre last year when how many people were dismissed? I think it was with a photocopy. It was just a kind of a very cold way of telling someone "Thank you very much, but you're through."

DIRECTOR TURNER: That was a big exaggerated. But we have reduced 820 positions. That is, government is going to pay for 820 less people. But in the long run, because a lot of people leave due to normal retirement, we only had to ask a couple of hundred to go. And out of that, the vast majority were put on retirement that they

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were entitled to.

Q: We read a lot about CIA. But I think the average person doesn't know exactly what the CIA does. Would you explain that as we continue "Noonbreak?"

DIRECTOR TURNER: Yes, I'd be glad to.

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Q: Admiral Turner, could you explain to the American people just exactly what the CIA does for us?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Yes. It does two basic things. The first is to collect foreign intelligence, information about what's going on in foreign countries. This is the spooky, the spying part of the business, James Bond, although that's a very exaggerated view of intelligence.

The second thing that we do, however, which is equally important and is very open, is to analyze, interpret the information which is received, to draw conclusions from it and to make information available to the policy-makers of our government so they can make good policy decisions for you and for me.

Q: Why do you think the CIA got this bad reputation? It seemed every time some controversy came out, when you delved into it deeply enough, you found CIA operatives that were staging things, doing things, a lot of things they shouldn't have been doing.

DIRECTOR TURNER: There're a couple of reasons, Bob. One is that there were some mistakes made in the past. Secondly, based on those mistakes, there were allegations that were improper, unfounded that there were many other mistakes that were not, in fact, made.

And finally, there's been a craze in this country, and it has a lot of merit, for investigative reporting. But in some cases that's been overdone. And today there's a general presumption, which I'm not so happy about, that all of us who try to keep secrets in our government are doing something bad and every whistleblower is a hero. We can't continue with that much longer if we're going to have a good intelligence capability.

Q: Elaborate on that.

DIRECTOR TURNER: Well, there is a need in any government and in any private individual's life for a certain amount of secrecy. And therefore, we must be able to preserve some secrets within our government process. And just because you blow a whistle doesn't mean that you're entitled to release secrets. There are established procedures for complaining....

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Q: I remember during the Nixon administration, everything was national security. And we never found anything out. Can't it be used badly?

DIRECTOR TURNER: It can. But there are these established procedures today so that somebody who thinks we're abusing secrecy can register a complaint without releasing the secrets to the press. If that doesn't satisfy him, he can then turn to the press. But none of them follow those procedures. The whistle-blowers are looking for fame and fortune, not to correct the system, in my opinion.

Q: Admiral, talking about the press, it's been said that there are a number of people in the press working for both either newspapers or broadcasting and the CIA. And these people -- we do not know who they are.

Could you tell us who they are?

DIRECTOR TURNER: There're none.

Q: There are none?

DIRECTOR TURNER: We have no relationships with any member of the American media. If you are accredited to an American media organization, you will not be on contract or under any formal association with the Central Intelligence Agency. That is my rule.

Q: A couple of lines there. You say "American." Are you using foreign trade people as operatives?

DIRECTOR TURNER: We are not excluding that possibility, because most of the foreign press isn't a free press any way, Bob, as you well know.

Q: How many employees are there in the CIA?

DIRECTOR TURNER: We keep that number classified, I'm afraid.

Q: I think in one of the articles it mentioned 4500. Is that close?

Q: Forty-five thousand.

DIRECTOR TURNER: We keep that number classified, I'm afraid.

Q: I understand.

Q: Getting back to the media, I think in a report in one

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Eastern -- maybe the Village Voice, it was mentioned five major impact newspeople were working for the CIA. And I also believe that it referred to the fact [that it was] with the knowledge of their bosses in the news media.

Now is that true?

DIRECTOR TURNER: That is not true today. It may have been true back then. But in February, 1976, my predecessor, Mr. George Bush, issued a regulation which I have since reconfirmed and somewhat strengthened prohibiting an association between us and any member of the American media.

Q: How can you keep track of that? I mean we can't say how many people work for you, but there's a lot of them, thousands out there. How do you keep track of what people several levels below you are doing?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Well, we have different levels of control, different levels of authority to make contracts with people. If someone down below violates it, there's a system of checks, and that system goes all the way up to the Congress of the United States, which has two committees which oversee us, call me up there on the carpet and ask me what am I doing with the media. And I must answer them, and I'm not anxious to go to jail or to be in violation of congressional mandates.

Q: Admiral, you do meet with the President twice a week, is that right, Tuesdays and Fridays, or whatever days it is?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Well, it's once a week, plus I go to the cabinet meetings once a week, if they take place once a week.

Q: And brief him personally.

DIRECTOR TURNER: Yes.

Q: Now this was not the event in the past, was it?

DIRECTOR TURNER: I think this shows President Carter's heightened interest in intelligence, both to get the information that he desires in order to help him make good decisions, but also to keep a close eye on the intelligence activities of our country, oversight from his level.

Q: You and the President are both Navy men. When we come back, I'd like to ask you about maybe a little difference of opinion between the old CIA people and the Navy moving in.

We'll be back with more "Noonbreak."

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Q: Our guest today on "Noonbreak" is Admiral Stansfield Turner, who directs the CIA. And before we broke away, I asked you about the people in the CIA. They're kind of secret, let's face it; that kind of an agency. You're a Navy man, the President's a Navy man. Is there a feeling, do you sense a feeling of maybe they want to keep it CIA and you Navy people, or naval intelligence people, are coming in on their territory?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Oh, I don't think that's a very big factor at all, Bob. I'm not the first Director of Central Intelligence who is either an outsider to the Central Intelligence Agency or is a military man. I'm the sixth military man. I think they're accustomed to that. It's like the Secretary of the Navy doesn't come from inside the Navy; he's a civilian who comes from the outside. An outsider is healthy occasionally.

Q: Admiral, we live in the greatest country in the world.

DIRECTOR TURNER: Yes.

Q: We believe in free speech and independence. But do you think sometimes people want too much free speech and too much knowledge?

DIRECTOR TURNER: I certainly do. Our government must keep some secrets. We're trying today to be as open as we can in the intelligence process. You may know we're publishing lots more information about what's going on in the rest of the world than we've ever done before. We want to help keep the American public as well informed and to give them a return on their investment in us.

But every government must have some secrets. You can't build expensive weapons systems or intelligence collection systems and compromise them overnight. You can't negotiate a SALT Treaty to help continue peace if your negotiating position is disclosed overnight. You can't have the kind of information that we need in order to make these negotiations successful unless you have intelligence, and that requires keeping secrets.

Q: What about -- I don't think anybody would disagree with that. But what about -- the feeling a lot of people is that the CIA gets involved in a lot of political things. I'm thinking back to student unrest, things like that, in the late '60s, early '70s, functioning, in a sense, as a secret police and fomenting some of the riots that we had. A lot of things have come out now.

DIRECTOR TURNER: Sure. A lot of that was exaggerated, Bob. To the extent it was true, it doesn't happen any more. We've got very strict procedures against that.

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Our job is overseas. We are a foreign intelligence activity. We're to find out what's going on in other countries, not to police or in any way handle activities in the United States.

Q: But you are working in all the other agencies. I mean they all somewhere along the line answer to someone, the FBI, those people.

DIRECTOR TURNER: Well, but I don't have any coordination over the FBI's domestic law enforcement. But the FBI does counter-intelligence, preventing people from spying on us in this country. The CIA does it overseas. Clearly we must have a real close teamwork or it isn't going to work.

Q: Where does the guy that works overseas draw the line when he comes back here and stops spying?

DIRECTOR TURNER: When he comes back here? If a foreign agent comes back over here and we're trying to surveil him, when he comes to the United States we have to shunt him from the CIA to the FBI. That's why we have to have good teamwork. Just like the Chicago Bears getting off the football.

Q: Is the KGB laughing at us a little bit because of some of the books that have come out, like Frank Snepp and things like that, former CIA people that are writing books and telling all these things?

DIRECTOR TURNER: I'm sure my counterpart in the Soviet Union is delighted that he doesn't have to face that problem. Yes.

Q: You mention that the CIA has done some studies, and they include Soviet oil, Soviet economy, world energy situation, and a study on terrorism.

What is the situation of Soviet oil and economy?

DIRECTOR TURNER: The Soviet oil production will decline, in our opinion, in the early 1980s, decline rather sharply, because they aren't taking the steps they need today to provide the capacity for production in the future. They're emphasizing current production. We think that's going to hurt the overall world energy situation, because they will have a need for importing oil as opposed to being able to export oil.

Their economy, in general, has some tough times coming up ahead. They have fewer people joining the labor force in the future. Their resources are getting more difficult to extract, like those in Siberia. So we expect a slowing of the Soviet economy.

Q: Very quickly, could you conceivably if some sheikh or somebody in the Mideast was giving the oil problems trouble --



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conceivably order assassinations?

DIRECTOR TURNER: Absolutely cannot. That is prohibited by presidential order.

Q: Thank you very much, Admiral Turner....

DIRECTOR TURNER: I enjoyed it.

Q: ...for spending your time with us. All right. We'll return with "Noonbreak" after these messages.

MAN: Okay, that's the end of our prerecording.